The Chat

Number 465 November 2020

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

Deadline for the December/January issue is November 20



NOVEMBER Program

Tuesday, Nov. 24 at 7:00 pm

Birding with a Clean Slate: Rediscovering Birding on the Other Side of the World

Presented by BRENDA MILLER

Many birders can relate to the excitement of finding a new bird, but what about birding in a completely new country? How does one identify a completely unfamiliar population of birds without being able to rely on old tricks and hints? Join Brenda as she

recounts her first birding adventure in her secondary home of Taiwan, and the joys of rediscovering birding with a clean slate.

Brenda Miller is from Kent, Washington, where she was introduced to birding by identifying songbirds with her father in their backyard. She is now a self-professed bird nerd who is always excited to share her love of birding with others! Brenda spent her undergrad days at the University of Puget Sound where she got her B.S. in Biology with a double major in Music, then went on to work as an educa-



tor for the Slater Museum of Natural History and later joined the board of directors for Tahoma Audubon Society. Brenda is pursuing a Master of Science in Environmental Education, as well as a Certificate of Nonprofit Management at Southern Oregon University. When she is not studying or birding, she is often cuddling with her ball python Cosmo or performing as a concert pianist.

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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.

NOTE: Until further notice, chapter meetings will be held on Zoom.

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Zoom instructions

The November chapter meeting will be live on Zoom on Nov. 24. If you already signed up, you won't need to sign up again. To sign up for the first time,

attendees will need to register by Nov. 22 via a new mailing list created just for RVAS Zoom events. Click on this link (https://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/zoom-

signup/) to register. After you register, you will be sent an email with the Zoom link on Nov. 23 and again on the day of the event.

Please check your junk mail as the messages can end up there. Contact RVAS via the website if you don't receive the link on the stated dates.

If you are new to using Zoom, OLLI has helpful information about using Zoom at https://inside.sou.edu/olli/courses/zoom-for-students.html.

Bird Monitoring on Bear Creek Greenway

RVAS is working on a schedule and survey protocol for regular bird monitoring on the Bear Creek Greenway. This will be an important citizen science opportunity to collect data on bird abundance and diversity after the Almeda Fire. We are still working out the details, but we will update our membership as soon as we have a plan and



the board's approval. In the meantime, if you think you might be interested in participating, please email Juliet Grable at julietgrable@gmail.com.

Status of upcoming events

Field trips - Suspended until further notice November Chapter Meeting - Nov. 24 @ 7pm

Letter from the Board

Sadly, the reality of our recent fires has come into focus since the last *Chat*. The impact to our community and environment is heartbreaking. But I know that our RVAS members are caring people who take action in challenging times to help out and create a better future. Despite the almost daily bad news, as I write this column, I am surprised to list the work that continues to fulfill our mission of conservation and education.

Zoom chapter meeting

Our first virtual chapter meeting in September was a great success not only because of Pepper's fascinating presentation, but because we thankfully had no technical problems. Recorded meetings are available on our website under "Chapter Meetings." We had 68 participants sign on, including several members of Klamath Basin Audubon Society. In the spirit of Zoom collaboration, they have invited RVAS to attend their Nov. 10 meeting featuring Chris Calonje's virtual birding tour of southwestern Colombia, including the Choco region and the cloud forests in the vicinity of the amazing Araucana Lodge. Go to klamathaudubon.org to register.

New board member

I am happy to welcome Kay Simmons to the RVAS Board. Kay's career was as a federal research biologist with the USDA, Agricultural Research Service, retiring as Deputy Administrator, Crop Production and Protection. Kay enjoys observing birds and birding trips. In recent years, Kay went birding in Cuba, Australia, Maine and Texas. She and her husband moved to Ashland from Maryland a year ago.

Christmas Bird Counts

The board and Christmas Bird Count coordinators are still discussing whether to hold this year's counts. The December *Chat* will announce the decision. Stay tuned.

New project at Kirtland Ponds

Rogue Valley Sewer Services is seeking to enhance mudflat habitat for shorebirds at its south sewage lagoon located on Kirtland Rd. in Jackson County. With the majority of the south lagoon no longer needed for sanitary sewage management, RVSS is interested in improving the remaining 13.7 acres for public access and usage. They have reached out to Rogue Valley Audubon to partner with them.

The official project title is "Wetland Habitat Creation, Enhancement, and Public Access at Rogue Valley Sewer Services Lagoon." Bob Hunter and Norm Barrett are



representing RVAS on the advisory committee. Recently, RVAS sent a letter to aid in a grant application for the planning and design phase.

I wish all of you good health and happiness as we navigate through these uncertain times.

Carol Mockridge

RVAS President

Field Notes for Jackson County October 2020

By Frank Lospalluto

The birds are the fine points, stabilizers, like the seas and the stars.

- Merrill Gilfillan

Two Tundra Swans were seen over Oak St. Oct 25. (BQ) A Snow Goose out at Agate Lake continues as of this writing, first spotted Oct 2. (GS, AG) Greater Whitefronted Geese have been migrating through and over the valley the last few weeks with a real peak in the first part of October, so that even the grandmothers were looking skyward. (KMc) American Wigeon numbers are starting to increase with over 300 on Howard Prairie Lake Oct 24. (VL) Twelve Canvasbacks were on Howard Prairie Oct 23. (TK) A lone **Redhead** was at Kirtland Ponds Oct 9 and another lone duck at Howard Prairie Lake Oct 17. (JK) Redheads tend to migrate in small flocks, unlike Ring-necked Ducks and Lesser Scaup. Nine Surf Scoters were on Lost Creek Lake Oct 22. (GS, JL, NB, JK) Small numbers of scoters seem to make their way to some of the deeper inland lakes in Oregon every fall. Two Barrow's Goldeneyes were on the water below the Lost Creek Dam Oct 20. (JG)



A **Red-necked Grebe** was on Howard Prairie Lake for a few days this month, last seen Oct 17. (JK) Though they have bred on Howard Prairie Lake in the past they are mostly a rarity in Jackson County.

A late migrating **Common Nighthawk** was spotted at Agate Lake Oct 3. (AG)

A **Rufous Hummingbird** was still visiting a feeder in the Little Applegate Sept 28 and one was near the Rogue River outside of Trail Oct 10. (MH, CP)

A lone **Black-bellied Plover** was at Howard Prairie Lake for few days Oct 11. (VL) A scattering of **Dunlin** settled along our lakes with two at Kirtland Ponds and three at Howard Prairie Oct 17. (AG, JK) Nine **Pectoral Sandpipers** were at Medco A Sept 27 and two were at Kirtland Ponds Oct 11. (JL, GS) Three **Red-necked Phalarope** were at the Medco A area along Lost Creek Lake Oct 7, and one was at Kirtland Ponds Oct 9. (RN, JK)

Four **Bonaparte's Gulls** were on Howard Prairie Lake Oct 22 and one was reported from Lost Creek Lake the same day. (VL, JK, JL, NB, GS). An **ICELAND GULL** was found on Lost Creek Lake Oct 3. (GS, NB, JL, SP) This was the sixth record for Jackson County. The bird seen here is one of the three Iceland Gull subspecies (*L.g thayeri*) which until recently was considered its own species, Thayer's Gull.

Common Loons have been spotted on Lost Creek Lake throughout the month with six seen on Oct 22. (JK) One Common Loon was on Howard Prairie Lake Oct 17. (JK) Ninety-two American White Pelicans were on Howard Prairie Lake Oct 18. (SP) Fifty or so have been loafing at Hyatt Lake the last couple of weeks despite the low water.

One hundred and sixty **Turkey Vultures** were seen near the old Siskiyou Summit Oct 7. (KM) **Osprey** continue to be reported even though area lakes are at record low levels. Two were fishing Howard Prairie Lake Oct 15. (VL) A **Rough-legged Hawk** was reported from Vesper Meadow Oct 19. (LF) A **Ferruginous Hawk** was near Touvelle Road Oct 10. (HS)

The fierce and defiant **Northern Pygmy-Owl** is often seen and heard during the autumn as it hunts most often at first light and last light. One was at Agate Lake Oct 20. (JC) A migrant **Short-eared Owl** was observed and photographed at Medco A in the middle of the day Oct 26. (JK)

Lewis's Woodpeckers are back and being seen in many of their favorite locations around the valley. SOU EE students working on a virtual Fall in the Field Program reported twenty from Rogue River Preserve. (BM)

The aptly named **Merlin** is being seen with greater frequency these autumn days as it stalks small birds like American and Lesser Goldfinches who are flocked up

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and feeding in various weedy fields. One was noted on a white oak at Emigrant Lake Oct 5. (VZ)

A late **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** was reported from Ashland Oct 11. (AA) **Black Phoebes** are being reported widely in our area as birds disperse from their local breeding spots. **Say's Phoebes** winter in the valley. One was seen and photographed in Eagle Point Oct 21. (HS) One was reported in the Little Applegate Oct 17. (MH) Look for the apricot belly as they perch on fence lines and on teasel and other vegetation in weedy fields and openings.

Hutton's Vireos are resident birds and sometimes mistaken for the very active Ruby-crowned Kinglet, which is an abundant winter bird here. Hutton's moves slower, has a thicker bill, and usually has blue-gray legs. Ruby-crowned Kinglets dance on golden feet, and have very thin bills. A Hutton's Vireo visited an Ashland residence Oct 2. (RT) A **Cassin's Vireo** was spotted in the Little Applegate Oct 4. (MH) Two **Warbling Vireos** were at Denman Sep 29. (JH)

Black-billed Magpies are regular at a North Valley View residence with two Oct 8. (KS) **Clark's Nutcrackers** regularly move through and around the Siskiyou Crest in the autumn. Two were on Big Red Mtn. Oct 16 (VL), and four to five birds were around Mt. Ashland Oct 18. (KMc)

There were recently a couple of reports of **Mountain Chickadees** in Ashland alongside expected Black-capped Chickadees. (RT, PT)

Horned Larks have been noted at a couple of locations this month. Four were at Medco A area near Lost Creek Oct 2, 7, and 22. (JK, TM, RN, LP, JL, GS, NB) Two were on Big Red Mtn. Oct 1. (VL) One was at Howard Prairie Lake near Willow Point Oct 24. (VL)

Most swallows have left us but a few were sighted this month, including 200 **Violet-green Swallows** at Lost Creek Lake Oct 7. (JC)

Ruby-crowned Kinglets really moved into and through our area in early October.

Twenty-five were counted in a small oak woodland near Pompadour Bluff Oct 8.

A single **Rock Wren** was noted recently at Agate Lake on the dam where they seem to be year round Oct 21. (RN) Two have also been reported from Lower Table Rock. (BQ) Two were reported from Emigrant Lake Park

Oct 16. (RT)

Four **Mountain Bluebirds** were along the dry shores of Hyatt Lake Oct 11, and three were near Howard Prairie Lake Oct 17. (JK) **Townsend's Solitaires** have been



moving into their winter territories where western juniper grows. They are the rare bird that sings at this time of year as they lay claim to the berry stashes. Parts of the Cascade-Siskiyou N.M. are excellent places to see and hear them. A **Varied Thrush** was in Ashland near South Mountain Ave. Oct 11. (AC) Two were on Heppsie Mt. Oct 15. (BB) Twenty were reported by a visiting birder around Joseph Stewart S.P. Oct 13. (BS)

American Pipits are common to see in the winter around the valley, especially in the sparse grass and rocky areas around Agate and Emigrant Lakes where flocks have been reported from this month, as well as on top of both Table Rocks. One birder was pleasantly surprised by one in the Little Applegate Oct 17. (MH)

Seven **Red Crossbills** were reported from the Rogue River Gorge Oct 13. (BS) Fourteen were near Siskiyou Summit Oct 18. (VL) One hundred and ten **Pine Siskins** were moving south over Joseph Stewart S.P. Oct 13. (BS) Fifty were in Eagle Point Oct 24. (HS)

A single **Chipping Sparrow** was at Medco A in some willows Oct 7. (RN) Five **Lark Sparrows** were reported from Lower Table rock recently. (BQ) Three were seen at Agate Lake Oct 20. One was at Rogue River Preserve Oct 23. (BM)

Sooty Fox **Sparrows** are back for the winter with numerous reports from the Denman and TouVelle S.P. area. (JH) Along with all the White-crowned and Golden-

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crowned Sparrows that have been moving in and through, there have been a number of White-throated Sparrow reports. One was photographed on Paradise Lane in Ashland Oct 4. Single birds have also been recently reported the last two weeks from the Manor, a Medford residence, a home on Agate Rd. and at Rogue River Preserve. (BM, GS, KB, LH, HS) The beautiful delicate Lincoln's Sparrow is being seen throughout the valley in weedy areas especially those that can be a bit wet. Though they can be a bit secretive, they can also display curiosity as they pop up on vegetation to delight the viewer.

Two Great-tailed Grackles were seen near Antelope Rd. and Highway 62 Oct 20. (JH) Like Brewer's Blackbirds they can be parking lot birds.

A Common Yellowthroat was spotted in Cantrall-Buckley Park Oct 4. (AG) Two were in North Mountain Park Oct 11. (KS) A **Yellow Warbler** was at Kirtland Ponds Oct 10. All errors and omissions are my own. Peace. (FL) Yellow-rumped Warblers are widespread in the valley and should continue to be so during the winter. A few straggling Black-throated Gray Warblers are about, with one in the Little Applegate Oct 25. (MH) A Townsend's Warbler was photographed at a feeder in Ashland Oct 23 and one was reported from Ashland at the suet Oct 3. One was reported from Medford Oct 17.

A Western Tanager was visiting Ousterhout Farm Oct 24. (BH) A Lazuli Bunting was at a residence in the Little Applegate Oct 5. (MH)

Thank you to everyone who contributed observations. Please feel free to send me any bird sightings at fdlospalluto@gmail.com. I am not on Facebook or connected on WhatsApp, so may miss some birds as I mostly glean from eBird and the RV birdlist.

This month's observers: Jim Livaudais, Russ Namitz, Leisyka Parrott, Norm Barrett, Gary Shaffer, Janet Kelly, Jim Hostick, Kate Sipfle, Sammie Peat, Rene Allen, Brenda Miller, Timothy Sorby, Bob Hunter, Howard Sands, Vince Zauskey, Bob Quaccia, Jon Cox, Tanner Martin, Kate Mckenzie, Kristi Mergenthaler, Karen Barrow, Pepper Trail, Roxanna Tessman, Amanda Alford, Leslie Hart, Andre Carvalhaes, Marion Hadden, Anne Goff and Violet.



The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

We made it to November! As I write this in late October, I've just dropped off my ballot, and by the time you receive this issue of *The Chat*, I'm sure most of you will have done so as well. But just in case you haven't – and this arrives before November 3 – here is some last-minute motivation for you.

Rogue Valley Audubon Society is a non-partisan organization, and does not endorse candidates. We do, however, provide information on environmental policies. Recently, the *New York Times*, working with the Harvard and Columbia Law Schools, published a list of over 100 environmental rules that have been reversed by the Trump Administration. The full list and details can be found at: https://www.nytimes.com/ interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html

For reasons of space, we limit ourselves here to the 17 entries on the list that deal specifically with wildlife issues. But the full list is worth a look, as most of the rollbacks will have indirect effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat. Over the last 4 years, the Trump Administration has:



- Changed the way the Endangered Species Act is applied, making it more difficult to protect wildlife from long-term threats posed by climate change.
- Ended the automatic application of full protections for 'threatened' plants and animals, the classification one step below 'endangered' in the Endangered Species Act.
- Relaxed environmental protections for salmon and smelt in California's Central Valley in order to free up water for farmers.
- Overturned a ban on the use of lead ammunition and fishing tackle on federal lands.
- Overturned a ban on the hunting of predators in Alaskan wildlife refuges.
- Reversed an Obama-era rule that barred using bait such as grease-soaked doughnuts to lure and kill grizzly bears, among other sport hunting practices that many people consider extreme, on some public lands in Alaska.
- Amended fishing regulations to loosen restrictions on the harvest of a number of species.
- Removed restrictions on commercial fishing in a protected marine preserve southeast of Cape Cod that is home to rare corals and a number of endangered sea animals. The Trump administration has suggested changing the management or size of two other marine protected areas in the Pacific Ocean.
- Proposed revising limits on the number of endangered marine mammals and sea turtles that can be unintentionally killed or injured with sword-fishing nets on the West Coast. (The Obama-era rules were initially withdrawn by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, but were later finalized following a court order. The agency has said it plans to revise the limits.)
- Loosened fishing restrictions intended to reduce bycatch of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna. Nonprofits have filed a lawsuit challenging the rollback.
- Overturned a ban on using parts of migratory birds in handicrafts made by Alaskan Natives.
- Proposed weakening critical habitat protections under the Endangered Species Act by making it easier to exclude certain areas, including for public-works projects such as schools and hospitals, and for public lands leased to non-government businesses.
- Opened nine million acres of Western land to oil and gas drilling by weakening habitat protections for the sage grouse, an imperiled bird. The Idaho District Court temporarily blocked the measure. The Montana District Court also invalidated the directive, nullifying 440 oil and gas leases, but the ruling is on hold pending appeal.

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- Rolled back a roughly 40-year-old interpretation of a policy aimed at protecting migratory birds, potentially running afoul of treaties with Canada and Mexico. In August, a New York district court struck down the administrative procedure, reinstating protection for birds. This is likely to be appealed if Trump wins a second term.
- Removed the Yellowstone grizzly bear from the Endangered Species List, but the protections were later reinstated by a federal judge. This is currently under appeal.

So: VOTE! VOTE! VOTE! VOTE! VOTE! VOTE! VOTE! VOTE!

More on Fires and Birds

Last month, the Conservation Column presented some information on how wildfires and smoke affect birds, and Juliet also reported on damage to the Bear Creek Greenway and Ashland Pond from the Almeda Fire. Unfortunately, it appears that Jackson County is taking an aggressive approach to cutting down big fire-killed cottonwoods, even in areas not accessible from the Greenway, such as east of I-5 near Phoenix. This will deprive birds of snags and the soil of nutrients when snags eventually fall and decay.

On the positive side, the county is dropping thousands of pounds of barley and native plant seeds in advance of the fall rains to help replant and stabilize bare soil, and has contracted with Lomakatsi Restoration Project to carry out additional erosion control. Rogue Riverkeeper continues to work with local agencies and organizations on short- and long-term plans. Among other things, they are recruiting volunteers for restoration efforts, ramping up water quality sampling, and starting a photomonitoring program to document restoration over time. As of this writing, fall Chinook have also made their way up Bear Creek. RVAS is looking at ways we can be involved, and we'll report back on that next month.

As a follow-up to last month's information, below is another article reprinted from National Audubon, focusing on the impact of the fires in California. Our conditions in southern Oregon are similar to California, so the information is very applicable.

How Do California's Megafires Impact Birds?

by Andrea Jones, Director of Bird Conservation at Audubon California, and Joanna Wu, Avian Ecologist at National Audubon Society.

Megafire: The new normal

"We're having to confront the reality that large wildfires, and the destruction that comes with them, are going to be a bigger part of our future here in California," says Andrea Jones, Audubon California's Director of Bird Conservation.

Hers is not a controversial opinion. This year is already California's worst year on record with regard to wildfires – beating out the past several years, which few thought we would ever top. More than a million acres burned across the state in 2017. This year, according to CalFire, as of August 30th, almost 3.1 million acres have burned, toppling previous years and a 5-year average of 310,000 acres. And we are not even close to done with fire season – there are still several months to go.

California is in uncharted territory with its fires, which are becoming more numerous, more frequent, more wide-spread, and more intense, with many started by human causes. These megafires are having severe impacts on communities throughout California and the West, and pose a new stressor to California's birds, which are already threatened by habitat loss, climate change, pollution, and other factors.

It is important to note here that wildfires are a natural and healthy part of California's forest, shrubland, woodland, and grassland ecosystems. Fires cycle nutrients and allow natural areas to regenerate properly. Giant sequoias need fire to crack their seed cones and germinate, and many large redwoods remain standing after the Santa Cruz fires.

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Birds and other wildlife have adapted to a natural fire regime over millennia, and their populations will not be negatively affected by them under normal circumstances; in fact, studies show that forests with a diversity of burns (i.e., low, mixed, and high severity) may have higher numbers of bird species after a burn. Birds such as the Blackbacked Woodpecker, which are found in California's Sierra forests, are known to move into severely burned areas to forage on dead trees. Fires can create snags (dead standing trees) that the California-endangered Great Gray Owl, Spotted Owl, and other large birds nest in.

Audubon recommends people should put out water sources, such as a bird bath, and bird seed or nectar for hummingbirds during this critical time. "I can't tell you how many times I've heard from people that they never saw a species of bird at their feeders until there was a big fire nearby," Jones says. "These birds migrating through are going to need some help."

As we begin to approach the rainy season, it's a good time to plan for planting plants in backyards and gardens that are native to California, as these are better adapted to drought and fire. Audubon's Plants for Birds database (https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds) can help people find out what plants are appropriate for their area.

Effects of Wildfire on Habitat

Sandy DeSimone is the director of research and education at Audubon's Starr Ranch Sanctuary in Orange County, and she has studied closely the effects of fire on habitat in Southern California.

"It's always important to understand that fire is a natural part of almost every California ecosystem, and in many ways is important to its health," says DeSimone.

DeSimone says that the intense, frequent fires that California has seen in recent years are not normal, and sometimes not healthy for habitat.

"There is research that shows that fires that return after five years or less can change habitat type," she says. "Studies have shown how frequent fires have converted shrubland landscape into non-native annual grassland. A change to a less supportive habitat could spell a lot of trouble for birds and other wildlife."

Even in areas where habitat does not convert, it will take a few years for complex layers of habitat to rebuild in California's burned areas, and as noted above in some cases, what returns may not be what was there before.

"Nesting habitat will be at a premium in the parts of the state that have burned in recent years and this could impact an entire generation of birds in some areas if they are unable to find suitable habitat," note Jones.

Moving forward

There is widespread agreement that California and other states in the West must improve their forest management efforts to reduce the risks of wildfire. Audubon agrees that the State of California must implement an ambitious program to make the state safer and more fire resilient, but strongly disagrees that State or Federal governments must relax environmental laws or regulations to accomplish these goals.

"The wildfire threats we're facing today are the result of over a century of poor landscape management in the state, an increase in human development in fire-prone areas, and increasing risks due to climate change.," says Mike Lynes, Audubon California's director of public policy. "To reduce risks to people, wildlife, and our economy, the State of California, communities, and stakeholders have to align to better manage our landscapes.

This will require significant public and incentives to private landowners and industry, but it will protect birds, communities, and other wildlife at the same time. We should also be listening to and learning from experienced managers of our ecological resources, including the Indigenous People of California who managed these lands and fire for millennia."



Vaux's Swift Fall Survey Highlights By Kate Halstead

As of early October, the Vaux's Swift migration was officially a wrap in Southern Oregon. This fall, RVAS coordinated evening roost surveys in Medford at Hedrick Middle School and a private residence. Our hard-working crew of 9 volunteers conducted 57 surveys this season between Aug. 12 and Oct. 02, with a total of 35,025 individual swift detections! And our surveyors were able to witness some amazing swift behavior, from wild murmurations, to swirling vortices, to dramatic attacks by avian predators. We are excited that Hedrick Middle School was again in the upper echelons of West Coast fall roost sites currently being monitored, rank-

ing 9th highest in average per-night counts at 1,753 birds. The data collected this year contributes to filling an important knowledge gap in how Vaux's Swift structure their migrations across space and time, and will be particularly important in RVAS's efforts to preserve the Hedrick Middle School chimney. Go Team Swift!

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